DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 380 SP 031 769

AUTHOR Marlow, Leslie; Hierlmeier, Ruthann McCormick
TITLE The Teaching Profession: Who Stays and Who Leaves?
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Job Satisfaction; Professional Recognition; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Persistence; Teacher Salaries; *Teaching Conditions
IDENTIFIERS Florida

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between the profiles of the current west central Florida classroom teacher and the "Likely Leaver" candidate in order to make recommendations addressing the combination of factors which lead to teacher attrition. Data were gathered from a random survey of Florida elementary, middle, and secondary teachers. The number of factors which indicated dissatisfaction and the characteristics identified by literature were tallied for each respondent to determine the possibility of that respondent's projected attrition. Factors identifying the typical "Likely Leaver" fell into two categories, demographic and attitudinal. Approximately half of the respondents were found to be "Leaver" candidates in the demographic category who felt that "the business world" offered greater intellectual stimulation. Dissatisfaction in the attitudinal factors reflected: (1) negative student attitudes and discipline problems; (2) disappointment and stress; (3) low salaries; (4) poor working condition; and (5) little professional recognition. Recommendations are made for improving the demographic area with more rigorous screening of teacher candidates and, in the attitudinal area, improving the existing atmosphere of the school environment. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315380

THE TEACHING PROFESSION: WHO STAYS AND WHO LEAVES?

Leslie Marlow

Ruthann McCormick Hierlmeier

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L Marlow

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP031 769

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

THE TEACHING PROFESSION: WHO STAYS AND WHO LEAVES?

Introduction

Specific characteristics have been identified which are associated with career change among teachers. A variety of factors and attitudes regarding the teaching environment tend to cause teachers to leave the field after a possibly brief stay (Bloland and Selby, 1980; Metropolitan Life, 1985; Gehrke, 1987). If educators devote extensive time and effort identifying the prospective student drop out and working diligently to hold that individual in school, then equal effort should be devoted to identifying the possible "Leaver" candidate from among the teaching ranks. According to Gehrke (1987), insights need to be gleaned from teachers who are possible or "Likely Leavers" from the profession. The education profession has a responsibility to help teachers realize the potential satisfactions of their chosen career.

As our society fluctuates and modulates, a constant review of the data on teachers leaving the profession is essential. It is beneficial for educators to know the factors affecting teacher attrition and ways in which it may be alleviated. The focus of this study was an investigation of the relationship between the profiles of the current West Central Florida classroom teacher and the "Likely Leaver" candidate in order to make recommendations addressing the combination of factors which lead to teacher attrition.

Bloland and Selby's "Factors Associated With Career Change Among Secondary School Teachers" (1980) and Metropolitan Life

Company's Survey of Former Teachers in America (1985) were the two studies which served as the basis for this research. Using the factors identified in these studies, a survey instrument was constructed and distributed to a random sample of classroom teachers in West Central Florida. Approximately 65% of the teachers contacted, representing elementary, middle, and secondary schools, responded to the survey. Based on past research, the results of the West Central Florida survey were examined to identify characteristics and areas of dissatisfaction attributed to the "Likely Leaver". The number of factors indicating dissatisfaction and the characteristics identified by the literature were tallied for each respondent to determine the possibility of that respondent's projected attrition. While a low percentage of the teachers, 20%, exhibited 50% or more of the characteristics of the typically leaving teacher, almost all teachers displayed various combinations of "Likely Leaver" factors and a disturbing number of teachers considered leaving the profession (Table 1).

Factors identifying the typical "Likely Leaver" fell into two categories:

1. Demographic - those areas describing social standing, such as marriage, age, gender, socioeconomic status.

2. Attitudinal - the philosophies and expectations that have evolved from training and experience.

Demographic Factors

Demographic factors researched indicated that the most "Likely Leavers" are single, male secondary school teachers; the married male secondary school teacher being the next most likely

to leave. Whereas the single male secondary teacher leaves the teaching profession, the married male secondary teacher typically leaves classroom teaching for a position in counseling or educational administration. These career moves, whether out of the classroom or into another area, are not necessarily made by teachers with special qualifications (ie: counseling) or more advanced educational degrees (ie: Masters).

In the West Central Florida sample, twenty-three percent were either single male secondary teachers (6%) or married male secondary teachers (17%). Thirty percent of all Florida respondents were secondary school teachers. Therefore, based on gender, marital status, and teaching grade level, less than half of the Florida respondents were within this high risk category.

Many beginning teachers find that once the reality of the classroom has set in they feel that "the business world" would offer greater intellectual stimulation. Therefore, they obtain a second job, usually in a business related field, and often leave the education profession to continue with that second job on a full time basis.

Ten years or less of experience in the field, another indicator of possible "Likely Leavers," was attributed to thirty-seven percent of the Florida teachers surveyed. While this constitutes less than half of those responding to the survey, it is a significant number. Those who have been in the teaching profession less than ten years, regardless of degree, are possibly more vulnerable to stress and disappointment and perhaps still more flexible in their lifestyle and commitments to consider a change in employment. Although advanced degrees

generally indicate a higher degree of commitment to the profession, an advanced degree does not ensure loyalty or solidify ties to the classroom.

Four out of every five respondents from the Florida sample felt no such loyalty to the classroom and had held a second job outside the school system within the past year. Additionally, one out of every three teachers felt the business world held the greater intellectual challenge. Florida respondents who were not totally satisfied with teaching for intellectual stimulation and/or monetary compensation looked for these things in other vocations. These elements stress the importance of encouraging professional interaction in an intellectual environment. Recognized teacher competence and competitive salary schedules will enhance our professional image. Teachers must not continue to feel left out of the professional or economic mainstream. Current trends suggest that the lure to gain professional recognition and compensations will eventually tempt even the most altruistic educator.

Prior to entering the field of education, forty-five percent of the Florida respondents had financial parental support while in college and fifty percent reported themselves as coming from white collar families. On this basis, approximately half of the respondents are "Leaver" candidates. Whereas a college education alone may be a significant self-improvement respected by blue-collar families, the teaching profession is not as significant an accomplishment for the person who seeks to match or improve on

parental, white-collar success. This component suggests an intrinsic social need that our profession does not supply. . . a well-respected and professional image.

Attitudinal Factors

The attitudinal factors contributing to attrition are those which have evolved through a teacher's training and experience. The literature reveals that ex-teachers identified several specific sources of disappointment and discontent: societal perceptions about teaching as a profession, reactions from their family and friends, and a host of expectations of their principals, colleagues and students. The "Likely Leaver," in summary, is the teacher who suffered "culture shock" upon entering the classroom, became frustrated and embittered with working conditions, lost support of closest family members, and looked to the business community for professional prestige and financial success.

Upon closer examination, we find that teachers are continually dismayed by public attitudes toward their chosen profession, a word which connotes a certain degree of earned respect. Having prepared in college to assume a role as a specialist, teachers are distressed and disappointed to discover in the second or third year that parents, press, and even peers seem to have slipped into criticism and complacency.

Many "Leavers" admitted that the low prestige they first experienced upon entering the profession was unexpected. If, as from the Florida sampling, one-third of the beginning teachers are finding their first year "a surprise," and if fifty-eight percent described the professional image of teachers as "worse

than expected," this would indicate that, while most teachers feel well prepared for teaching, a majority are disappointed and discouraged by the lack of respect given to their career choice (Table 2). Amidst these daily disappointments and frustrations, teachers eventually weigh life's career expectations. The white-collar person, 50% of our Florida respondents, who chose the classroom has not joined the ranks of parental peers. The teaching profession has not supplied this person with that intrinsic social need.

Within the interpersonal school setting, the teacher's principal and colleagues are very important, and unrealized expectations from them contribute to eventual attrition. Leavers tend to come from large schools where principals are perceived as stifling creativity and where the principal and the students differ racially from the teacher. Sixty-nine percent of Florida teachers responded that they felt their respective principals supported creativity. Ninety-two percent of teachers responding to the survey worked in racially mixed large schools, eighty-seven percent taught "both" races, and ninety-two percent were of the same race as their respective principals. This is good news for Florida teachers whose creativity appears to be encouraged and who seem to have located themselves in a comfortable setting. Unfortunately, those teachers who had not shared a pupil ideology with their peers were more motivated to leave. One in four of Florida teachers surveyed perceived their teaching techniques as different from that of their peers.

With the negativism provided by society and disappointment by principals and colleagues, it is significant when family

members and close friends no longer offer a sympathetic ear to daily routines and frustrations of the teacher. As a teacher's best friend, spouse, or both tire of hearing about classroom problems, the "Likely Leaver" loses support. Research has shown that encouragement to leave from either source to weigh heavily in a teacher's decision to leave. Approximately thirty-five percent of Florida respondents indicated that their spouses and best friends were not supportive of their career.

Although salaries are commonly considered and reported to be one of the more significant reasons given teachers leaving the profession, low salaries are not only an economic restriction but, more importantly, as we discussed in demographic factors, do not reflect and signal the professional status expected and desired. Florida respondents, 46%, ranked salaries as only the third most important reason for leaving teaching.

Other contributing factors to teacher attrition are subtle and accumulating. Florida teachers were asked about the factors which would most strongly contribute to their decision to leave teaching. Completing the sentence "I would leave teaching because..." uncovered some interesting information (Table 3).

The greatest degree of teacher frustration, 51%, comes from the classroom environment, the daily workplace and its inhabitants. The other factors are contributing and related but peripheral to the most significant determining force - the prevailing attitudes and atmosphere of the classroom:

1. Negative student attitudes and discipline problems 51%
2. Emotional Aspects - boredom, stress, frustration, same routine 50%
3. Low salaries 46%
4. Working Conditions - class size, work load, nonteaching duties 44%
5. No relationship between salary and production; No reward and advancement 38%

Many well-prepared and enthusiatic teachers succumb to the temptation to leave.

Of the seven reasons identified, many are clearly items that we, in the profession, the district offices, and the schools can work towards improving. If the education profession seeks to attract and retain educators, factors which signal the likelihood of teacher dissatisfaction and eventual attrition should be examined closely so that recommendations may address specific dissatisfactions prompting change agents to make the field of education more attractive.

Recommendations

As we examine the circumstances and environment of the classroom teacher, we must consider that the demographic factors of their lives may have prequalified them for potential dissatisfaction and consequent stress which culminates most naturally in leaving. At the same time, we need to consider the attitudinal factors identified by participants in the teaching field and address corrections for those factors.

Looking at demographics first, reasons exist to screen teacher trainees according to background, goals, and commitment.

More rigorous screening would eliminate those entering the education field without total commitment simply because they are unsure of what else to do with their lives. Screening, followed by training with emphasis on specialized areas according to the screening process, would nurture a successful and satisfied professional. Opponents, however, suggest that we may create unreasonable and unworkable biases for our profession, while others fear the shortage which may be created by this kind of selection process.

Another recommendation offered to compensate for demographic factors is more preparation for our teachers in training. While many colleges of education are providing more and more field experience in their programs, exposure to diverse cultural situations is not always provided. Internship programs need to include a greater variety of placements and experiences in suburban, rural, and inner-city schools. Universities need to train for more of these "realities" of the profession and provide students with the emotional and psychological tools needed to succeed.

Many more arguments are made to address attitudinal factors by improving the existing atmosphere of our school environment. Working within the current framework, many recommendations are suggested for administrative policies and support which would reinforce directly the teacher's efforts in the classroom by removing the hindrances of excessive paper work, student discipline problems, and inadequate teaching materials. Goal setting from principals was noted as a particularly valuable tool

for initiating positive reinforcement and valuable feedback.

This necessity for feedback not only from administrators, but colleagues as well is an important support system for teachers. The isolated classroom teachers who do not feel an essential part of the entire system too often fail to see their roles as integral to the general scheme of things. Opportunities to share and learn from each other is a valued suggestion from many sources.

This sharing and learning is also essential to the beginning teacher who needs fewer responsibilities, release time, and an abundance of feedback and mentoring during the novice years. Novices often enter a teaching position only to find that as new teachers they are expected to "prove" their effectiveness. At this stage in their careers, they are reluctant to admit weaknesses or seek help and yet they are often placed in a more challenging environment of basic classes with textbook shortages and inadequate classroom space. Feedback for instructional as well as motivational reasons is to be a key recommendation.

Finally, we must not neglect the professional development of our veteran teachers and their potential for mentoring and assuming greater responsibility for their peer teachers. Career ladders and release time incentives can be designed to enhance an individual teacher's reward system while at the same time supplementing classroom instruction with models of good teaching.

Conclusion

As we identify the characteristics and factors contributing to the dismaying statistics on attrition, we have the opportunity to evaluate and address the teacher at risk. Research has

resulted in recommendations that could enhance the profession for both the teacher candidate and the veteran teacher. It is vital that we continue to review the combination of factors that threaten not only our teachers but our profession.

Bibliography

Bloland, P. A. and Selby, T. J. "Factors Associated With Career Change Among Secondary School Teachers: A Review of the Literature." Educational Research Quarterly, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1980, 12-23.

Chapman, D. W. "Teacher Retention: Test of a Model." American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1984, 645-658.

Gehrke, N. J. On Being a Teacher. West Layfayette, Indiana: KDPi, 1987.

Mark, J. and Anderson, B. D. "Teacher Survival Rates in St. Louis, 1969-1982." American Educational Research Journal. Vol. 22, No. 3, 1985, 413-421.

McLauglin, M., Pfeifer, R. S., Swanson-Owen, D. "Why teachers won't teach." Phi Delta Kappan. Vol. 67, No. 6, 1986, 420-426.

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Survey. "Former Teachers in America." June 1985.

Rosenholts, S. J. "Political myths about education reform: Lessons from research on teaching." Phi Delta Kappan. Vol. 66, No. 5, 1985, 349-355.

Schlechty, P. C. and Vance, V. S. "Do academically able teachers leave education? The North Carolina case." Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 63, No. 1, 1981, 106-112.

Table 1 - Considerations About Leaving Teaching

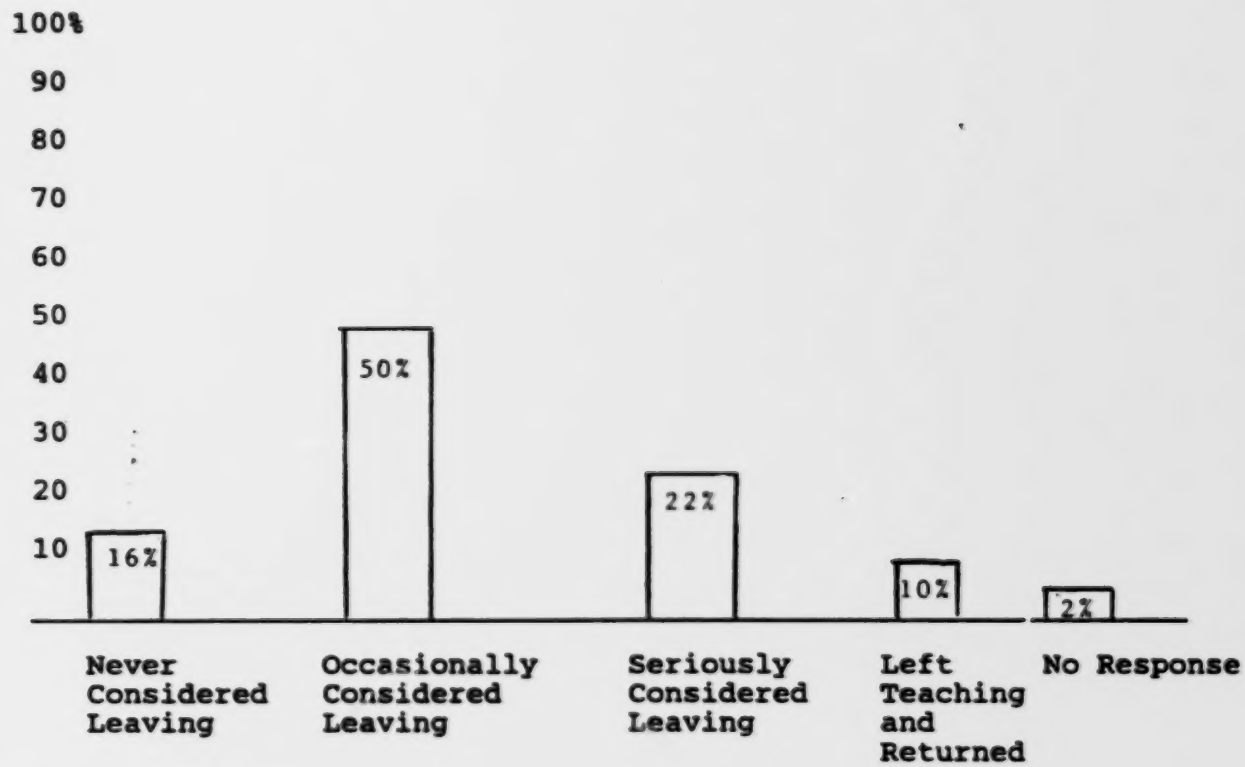

Table 2 - Expected Professional Prestige

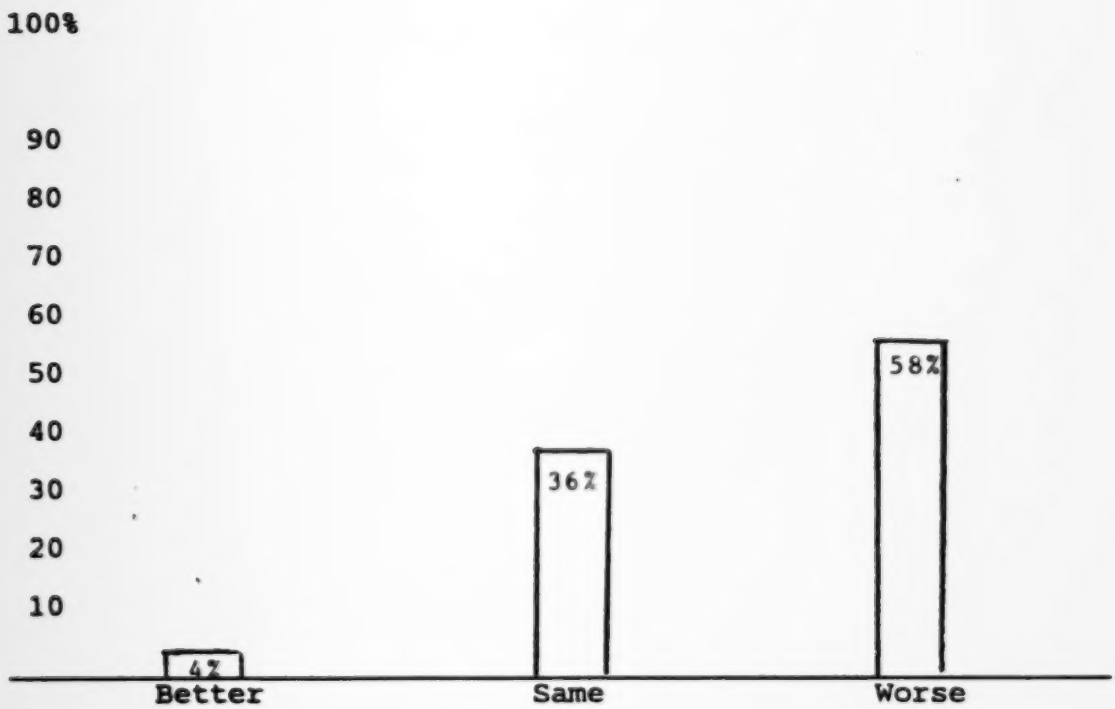

Table 3 : Attitudinal Factors Related to Leaving